Interview with Elizabeth Raspolic

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

ELIZABETH RASPOLIC

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Q: What interested you in foreign affairs?

RASPOLIC: I suppose I could say that I was fortunate in that I had already had experience in living and working overseas, having been a former member of the Peace Corps staff in three countries.

Q: What countries were those?

RASPOLIC: Pakistan, Thailand, and Tunisia. Also I had a Washington assignment with them. So I came back, worked in Washington for a while, for another agency, and knew in my heart of hearts that I really wanted to go back overseas. So that inspired me to sign up one day for the Foreign Service exam.

Q: You came in when?

RASPOLIC: August of 1973.

Q: This is an interview concentrated on the consular function. What type of consular training did you have before you went overseas?

RASPOLIC: I had just a month of the most dreadful times. I began to seriously question what I had done. It was the old version of consular training at FSI, before the ConGen Rosslyn concept. I remember they would bring in god-awful lecturers. They weren't god-awful; they seemed god-awful at the time, but I'm sure they were quite talented people from various parts of VO or other parts of the CA bureau. But they simply were not teachers, and they were very familiar with their material and would sit and basically read various sections of the FAM, Foreign Affairs Manual, to us. The regulations are hard enough to deal with on your own, but when you have to sit and listen to someone else read them to you, it begins to be a little ludicrous. So my classmates and I used to have a few pithy things to say about the content of the course.

I did not feel particularly well prepared when I went overseas, to immediately assume the role of a consular officer, and I was a little bit concerned also because I was going to a two-man post.

Q: You were going where?

RASPOLIC: To Lyon, France. It would have been one thing had I been going to a larger post, where if you had a procedural question, you could always turn to a colleague and ask, “How is this done?” But when there's only one other person in the post, and that person has never served as a consular officer, then you really do have to rely on the FAM and your own wits, and also how well the long-distance telephone system works in the country, so that you can call a nearby post and ask for advice.

Q: What were your responsibilities in Lyon?

RASPOLIC: Basically, I was sent to be the vice consul in charge of consular operations, and to oversee the administrative side of the office. I ended up doing that, plus doing some USIS work and also working with the commercial section. Admin, USIS and Commercial were all parts of the office that were run by French staff members. The American CG did

his own thing and wrapped himself in the flag and showed up on various official occasions, and sometimes took an active role in commercial affairs, but mostly left the rest of it to me. It worked out well for me, because I was very interested in doing as much as I could, learning as much as I could.

Q: Was there much consular business there?

RASPOLIC: There was, but it was rather limited in scope. We did not handle immigrant visas at all; those were handled only by the Embassy in Paris. We had the second largest NIV issuance in the country, outside of Paris. We had an enormous number of businessmen in eastern France, who had a lot of business with the United States. We also had a lot of ACS [American Citizen Services] work, because the Alps were in our district, the ski resorts were in our district. We had a lot of cardiacs, a lot of deaths, a lot of tragedy, frankly, that had to do with the ski season. So that kept us rather busy.

Q: Can you give me an idea of how a ski case might work?

RASPOLIC: I remember one case very clearly, a death case where a charter group came over from Philadelphia. I believe it was the telephone company charter. They arrived in Grenoble and immediately went to the slopes. It was a nice, bright, sunny day, and it was misleading, obviously, because some of these people went skiing inadequately prepared for the weather. One fellow, in particular, was wearing jeans and a tee shirt and went skiing, because the sun was shining and he felt apparently that he could get by with this kind of clothing. Halfway up the mountains, the weather changed dramatically, he got lost in a sudden snowstorm, he completely lost his sense of direction, and he was found the next day frozen to death.

The French were simply appalled. Aside from the tragedy of the whole thing, they simply couldn't believe that anyone would be so lacking in judgment or so ill prepared to enjoy a

sport. The man had appropriate ski clothing in his luggage, as it turned out. It was totally unnecessary for him to have died that way.

So my first indication of all of this was a call from the Grenoble police, telling me that they had a missing American, presumed dead. That was the night before. Then I went over to Grenoble the next morning. There was no point in going at night for a search and rescue operation on a mountainside. So I went over at 7:00 the next morning, about a two-hour drive from Lyon, and they found the body maybe three hours later, brought it down the mountain, and I had to do the usual notification of next of kin and make arrangements for the shipment of the body home.

Q: In notification of next of kin, how did it work at that time? Did you talk to them directly?

RASPOLIC: No. I'm trying to think. We've had so many changes in the procedure. It must have been a telegram at the time, then a follow-up offering the family the option of getting in touch with us by phone, which most people did, considering we were in western Europe and it was quite an easy operation. I don't recall initiating a phone call, no, so they must have called me.

Q: Was the non-immigrant side of visas a problem? These were businessmen, also French. The French seemed to return more than almost any other group.

RASPOLIC: They do. They don't use their maximum immigrant visa numbers at all. They never have, as far as I'm aware, at least not since I've been in the Foreign Service. There were some problems, not all that many. Certainly the problems were nothing compared to problems that I faced in other countries later on in my career.

France is the only country I've ever served in where we had mail-in visa applications. That really was just a mechanical problem for us, because we had one full-time French visa assistant, who was wonderful. She had been with the consulate since the late forties, and she knew more about visas than probably I'll ever know. We worked together very, very

closely on processing mail-in applications. We also had a couple of summer hires during the peak season that would come in and help. So business visas were quite routine. Most student visas were quite routine. Once in a while we had some questions. They had to be interviewed in person, anyway.

Our biggest problem, I suppose, with visas were two categories of cases. One was third-country nationals, non-French citizens, who would either be passing through or would be in France for some unspecified reason and suddenly decide that it was imperative that they go to the United States. The other problem was just the usual French au pair who claimed to be going for six weeks to visit Disneyland, but actually more often than not, had a contract from an American family offering them an au pair job. At that time, it was illegal to have an au pair.

Q: How would you sort these out?

RASPOLIC: Through personal interview. You'd listen to what they were saying, and also weigh that against, in your mind, what they weren't saying, and see whether you could come up with a reasonable solution.

Q: Were these difficult? After you had refused, would you then get all sorts of pressure to issue a visa?

RASPOLIC: Not very often, frankly. Not in France. I did have one very funny case. A girl who I had refused, I had suspected she was a possible au pair, and I had refused her. Then she'd come back in and applied again. We had a very interesting conversation, and I thought perhaps I'd really misjudged her. I went ahead and issued the tourist visa.

Lo and behold, about four or five days later, she walks back into my office with her mother, and her mother was absolutely livid. I said, “What on earth is wrong? Why don't you come into my office and we'll sit down and discuss this.” So we sat down. It turned out that the girl had gone off to the United States with a B-2, arrived in JFK, and had her luggage

searched, because INS at JFK did not believe her. Lo and behold, she had an au pair contract in her suitcase. So they put her on the next plane back.

Her mother was furious with the American government because the mother had wasted the money on the plane ticket, and she wanted to know what we were going to do about it and what the family needed to do to get the girl back into the United States. I just threw up my hands at that point and said, “Listen, the girl has already lied to me. Now you're asking me to counsel you on how to break our laws again? Get out of here!” (Laughs) It was just outrageous, absolutely outrageous. But it was also very French.

Q: Did you serve in consular work the whole time you were in France?

RASPOLIC: Yes.

Q: How were your relations there with Paris, as far as from a consular support point of view?

RASPOLIC: All of the consulates were under the jurisdiction of the consul general in Paris. It didn't matter what the subsidiary function was of the consulate. Both my boss and I reported to the consul general in Paris. He would come through on sweeping inspections maybe once or twice a year, and that was sort of it, and we would never hear from him again.

On the other hand, when I had tricky visa cases and I really wanted to check on procedures, or even an ACS case that I really wasn't sure of, because I hadn't handled a case like that in the past, I could very easily call Paris and ask for guidance. I must say the person who handled the waivers in the visa section, Peter Murphy, who later was DCM in the Vatican for several years, was extremely helpful, very, very helpful. And Ruth McClendon at that time was head of the American Citizen Services section in Paris, and she also was very wise in telling me when to follow the FAM exactly, and when I could forget about the FAM. (Laughs)

I remember one case in particular, I had an American drifter who was panhandling. The French were trying to get him out, and I was trying to get him out. I was trying to have a repatriation loan authorized by the Department. At that time, the FAM said, “Send the memorandum in and we'll let you know as soon as the decision is made.” So I called Ruth and said, “Ruth, I sent this thing in by memorandum. It's going to take ten days for them to get it. In the meantime, this guy is here running up a hotel bill. It's just a holy mess. Can't we do this any faster?”

She said, “Oh, my God, send it in by telegram. Forget the FAM!” (Laughs) I had not had a repatriation case, so that's why I simply didn't know that the Department was that flexible.

Q: There are certain things which are built-in delays which are almost on purpose.

RASPOLIC: Probably so. I'm sure there are other cases, certainly renunciation of citizenship. My God, there's simply no point in hurrying that along. If you give the person enough time, perhaps whatever decision they come up with is a considered decision. That's fine. I can see the value in that. Repatriation, usually by the time the case has walked into your office, the situation is rather desperate. Time really sometimes is of the essence. This fellow, not only was he a drifter, but he had three kids with him. His wife had walked out on him—with cause, I think. (Laughs) But what we had, basically, this man was 35 years old and was perfectly capable of caring for himself, but he was ignoring the health and well being of his three little kids, who were all under the age of seven or eight.

Q: Of course, he was running up a bill, which did not work to the benefit of the American government.

RASPOLIC: Not at all. Besides, the case was becoming more and more of a thorn in the side of the French authorities, too, so it behooved us all, I think, every player, to get this family out as soon as we would and could.

Q: Did you get him out?

RASPOLIC: Well, sorry you asked that. What happened was I did get the authorization for the repatriation loan, I did set up the return reservations, I did offer the guy and his family a ride to the airport, and he said, no, no, no, he thought he could get them out there himself. He was very, very thankful, this and that. The next thing I knew, he did not catch the plane. The reason I knew that was I had a call from Ruth McClendon in Paris, who said that the man had been picked up for panhandling in the lobby of the Hilton Hotel in Paris 24 hours later. So I succeeded in getting him out of my consular district. (Laughs) Paris ultimately had to plop him onto a plane and get him back to the States. In fact, I think what Paris ended up doing was getting authorization from him to send the children back to the United States, and if he wanted to mess around in France, that was up to him. But it simply reached the point where it was much more a concern for the welfare of the children. It was a memorable case, I must say.

Q: Your next post was Seoul. I have to be rather careful here. I might add for the record that you were already in Seoul when I arrived, but I was consul general there, so if there are any disparaging remarks about the consul general, we know from whence it comes and to whom it's directed.

RASPOLIC: Goodness, I've been waiting all these years for this opportunity, Stu! Not many officers have this chance.

Q: When you arrived in Seoul, this was your second assignment. You'd already had a fairly full background with the Peace Corps and overseas. What did you think of consular work as a profession at that point?

RASPOLIC: I don't think I'd made any real judgments on it yet at that point, because I still felt that I was very much learning the trade. When it came time to bid on my next

assignment out of Lyon, we really didn't exactly have a bidding process at the time. They were just putting that in place.

Q: This was 1976.

RASPOLIC: I was in Lyon from January 1974 to January 1976, so the assignment would have been made in the fall of 1975. I had decided that there were two things that I wanted to take advantage of. One was the fact that if I was going to be a professional consular officer, I had not yet even seen an immigrant visa, let alone issued one. I didn't know what they looked like. So I thought the thing to do would be to go to a post large enough to issue immigrant visas. The second thing was that I thought, at that point in my career, while I was still a junior officer, the thing to do was move around from continent to continent as much as you can, without beginning to become specialized in any particular geographic area.

So I spoke to my career counselor, and he said, “Funny that you should put those two things together, because we have an opening in Seoul.” I had always wanted to go to Korea, and why not? So off I went.

Q: Could you describe the consular operation in Seoul when you got there in spring of 1976?

RASPOLIC: The facilities were dreadful, simply dreadful. I guess that's probably been the complaint of the consular section there for years. There was a combined waiting room for NIVs, IVs, and ACS. The entrance was a side utility staircase, up the outside of the building, from the ground up to the first floor, where we were. In the American system, it would be the second floor. You walked in and there was a little small office to the left that was NIV's, and then you walked further down and there were a series of counters that handled the IV section. Off to the right was this strange little counter that was ACS.

I first went into the ACS area and worked with Bill Duffy, who was a first-tour officer, but he had had some ACS experience. We did American Citizens Services work, and we also accepted immigrant visa petitions. People came and filed them at our counter. Half of the waiting room was facing us as we worked at this counter. Bill used to refer to us as “in-flight entertainment,” because customers would sit and watch us for hours, waiting for their turn to be called for whatever it was they were waiting for, whether it was an immigrant visa or something else. We were there at the counter trying to deal with people who were coming up, trying to register their American citizen children, or more often, trying to register their illegitimate children, as American citizens, or filing an immigrant visa petition, or just having notarials taken care of. I suppose we were rather funny. Certainly we were very active. We were constantly up and down.

Q: What were your particular problems in doing the ACS work?

RASPOLIC: That's hard to say. In filing immigrant visa petitions, we had to be as careful as we could of fraudulent supporting documents. Obviously, the longer you were there, the more experience you had and it was easier to pick them up or sort them out, sort out the difference between what was valid and what was invalid.

We had to deal with passport applicants, many of who were first-time applicants from the military base, and who simply had no experience in applying for passports. So we had to hold a lot of hands and get that sorted out.

We had some people who were very impatient, the usual thing. The consular section in Seoul was so large and had such a high volume, that it tended to wear people's patience away, both the officers and the public. So if the public had been waiting very long for service, by the time they got up to the counter, quite a few of them were more than willing to tell us their opinion of our operation. (Laughs) So that got to be hard.

Sometimes, also, people would be frustrated with either the non-immigrant visa or the immigrant visa units, but couldn't get to an American officer over there to complain, and there we were, right at the counter, so they would come over and vent their spleen at us for what they considered to be an inappropriate decision on the other side of the hall.

Q: Just the very fact that the place was poorly laid out had a major impact on your work.

RASPOLIC: Very much so. It was depressing for us, it was depressing for the public, and it was terribly inconvenient. I'm sure a lot of the Korean clientele didn't realize it was as inconvenient as it was, because it may have been their first exposure to an American office, and they would not have had anything to compare it to. The Americans who came in, more often than not, were simply appalled by the poor facilities, the lack of a proper traffic pattern, the lack of just, for god's sakes, even a paint job on the walls, the lack of attractive office furnishings or chairs for the public to sit in.

Q: Why do you think this had happened? This had been going on for years.

RASPOLIC: I think there are always several reasons. Probably one of them is lack of vision on the part of the supervisory officers in the section. No matter how glorious the vision is of someone in charge, if there's no money to implement a plan, then the vision is for naught. Also it's not just a consular section problem; it's perhaps a fault of the consular section not working very closely with the administrative section, and even more so, perhaps a problem of the ambassador or the DCM not supporting the needs of the consular section, or perhaps not understanding that the consular section is what the public sees when they come to the embassy. It's really worth the investment to make the place as pleasant as it can be.

Q: When you arrived, did you feel there was much contact with the rest of the embassy, as far as the ambassador or the DCM?

RASPOLIC: No. There are two sides to that question. In Korea, it was the first time I had ever lived on a compound. This was compound living, and I was very leery of it before I came. But one advantage to compound living is that you do get to know your neighbors who work in other sections of the embassy. So a combination of getting to know them at home, plus sometimes getting to know them in the cafeteria, although I must say at lunchtime, the consular section tended to stick to itself and regale each other with stories of what had happened that morning, and also we had a very short lunch hour, as I recall, so there wasn't much socializing going on.

I don't remember, really, there being much interest expressed in the consular section at all by the front office.

Tom Stern was not DCM when I arrived.

Q: No. I arrived in early July of 1976, and Tom Stern arrived about a day or two before I did.

RASPOLIC: I know I'd remember the name of the previous DCM if I heard it, but whoever he was, he was never in the consular section. Tom Stern was the only DCM I ever saw that came down to the consular section, and he came down, I believe, at your invitation. He came on a regular basis.

Q: He came on a regular basis, and things started to move, which I won't take credit for. There had already been a major plan to renovate—not wonderful, but at least they did gut the whole consular section and make it far more efficient.

RASPOLIC: It was terribly inefficient, I must say. One of my biggest problems the first week or so that I worked there was taking the elevator up. Walking in the front door of the chancery, to get to the consular section, you had to use the elevator. You had to use the elevator; you couldn't use the staircase. The staircase was blocked off for security reasons, even though it was only one floor away. So we went up by the elevator, but then

when I got off the elevator, I had a hell of a time finding my own office. It was ludicrous! It was absolutely ludicrous! But you had to weave your way, or wind your way through this warren of offices and strange little work spaces that later on became old hat. And I have a very good sense of direction, and I was appalled that I was working in a place that I could get lost in.

Q: I remember when I arrived, I found a little cubbyhole of an office painted pink.

RASPOLIC: I wouldn't be surprised. (Laughs)

Q: You were doing American Services, and then you moved over.

RASPOLIC: Then we rotated. I think I probably went into IVs. I did IVs for a few months, and that was my first great introduction to immigrant visas. I remember I followed the traditional path. We would start new officers off with immediate-relative categories, because they were relatively easy to do and rather routine. Then you worked your way into P-5s, brothers and sisters and American citizens, and really became quite good at reading the family register and trying to sort out family relationships and what was real and what wasn't real, what had been added on and what made no sense, and what seemed to be okay.

Then only after you'd been doing it a while would you start branching off then into professional categories of P-3s and P-6s. And God forbid you should be faced with a Minister of Religion case! (Laughs)

Q: There seemed to be a logic to this. It was a big enough section so you weren't thrown into the deep water right away.

RASPOLIC: No. As I recall, we had three American officers interviewing full time, plus we had an American supervisory officer. Then we had a huge staff of Koreans, probably none of whom are with us anymore. (Laughs) It was quite a busy section.

Q: But there was a logic to the assignments within this large section?

RASPOLIC: Yes, yes. The people who had been there longest had more complicated cases, and people were quite good about teaching newcomers then how to go about handling cases. I rotated into the NIV section from there.

Q: Going to the immigrant section, which at that time was, I think, number two to the Philippines—maybe still is.

RASPOLIC: I think so.

Q: Can you describe some of problem-type cases?

RASPOLIC: The problem-type cases were generally military related. Sometimes it would be a question of their not qualifying for the visa or our having to suspend action until we could do a little more investigation on some aspects of the case. We had problems with wives who had been prostitutes, who were registered prostitutes under the Korean system, for whom we then had to stop and get an INS waiver. This was prior to INS having shifted its office from Tokyo to Seoul, so then we would have to get in touch with Tokyo, and it would take a little while longer.

Then we got into the other half of our usual problem, and that was military orders requiring somebody to PCS [permanent change of station] to their next post, and who wanted to take along his or her family. Of course, these guys would let all of this go until the very last minute and not build in any slack at all in case there was a problem. So we would have to suspend action and say, “I'm sorry, we have to ask INS for an advisory opinion,” or send the case to INS for a determination. This would be a Tuesday, and the fellow would say, “But listen, I'm shipping out on Thursday. We're going as a family.” So then the fellow would either have to change his travel plans if he could, but it simply was beyond his power. Then sometimes we would have to step in on his behalf and perhaps get in touch either with his commanding officer, or if that would not be appropriate, perhaps the

chaplain, and ask the chaplain to use whatever methods he had within the military to see if he could get some sort of compassionate extension on the case. Problems such as that we had.

We had other much more mundane problems. A Korean nurse who was applying to come to the States as a nurse, but who couldn't speak English. While English wasn't necessarily a requirement for P-3 eligibility, we felt very strongly and had INS backing that there was no way the nurse could assume her offered nursing position in the United States if she didn't speak English. If she was going to be involved in direct patient care and the patient asked her a question or needed help, she was going to have to be able to understand what the patient was saying. So we had some very funny and very amusing interviews, I must say, with the P-3 nurses.

Q: How would this work? What would you do?

RASPOLIC: I suppose each officer developed his or her own patter, but I remember one nurse coming in, and I said, “Please be seated, Miss Kim.” Miss Kim would sit down and I'd say, “Miss Kim, I understand you're a nurse.”

“Yes.” Just plain yes.

I'd say, “Please tell me where did you did your nurse's training?” This one woman just sort of stared at me, and I said, “Miss Kim, where did you study nursing?” She kept staring at me, and I said, “Miss Kim, did you go to nursing school? Which nursing school did you go to?”

She finally just sort of exhaled and said, “Alcohol massage.” (Laughs) I just sort of looked at her, and she was looking at me. It was quite clear that what she had done was memorize a series of answers to questions that were supposed to have been asked of her. I was not apparently helping, because I seemed to be asking the wrong questions, and the lady had absolutely no comprehension of spoken English at all. So I suggested to her

that she go back and study for three or four months before she come in again for another interview. That's how it worked out.

We had a little bit more of a problem with that kind of case when they were married and would come in with their husband. Both husband and wife had to be interviewed. But it was the wife who was trying to get the P-3 status, although it was quite clear that the husband was much more highly educated than the wife, the husband was bilingual. The husband would oftentimes turn and try and prompt the wife during the English interview. It was quite clear, frankly, that the wife had absolutely no intention of working in the United States, that the husband was using the wife's talent to qualify for the P-3 that he couldn't qualify for, but that he was going to support the family and she was not going to work. So that got to be a bit of a problem in some cases, too, because then she wasn't eligible for the visa if we had reason to think she wasn't going to accept the employment.

Q: What about the relationship problem of who was related to whom, using the family register? This was a very difficult situation, wasn't it, in Korea, because it could be manipulated?

RASPOLIC: It could and it couldn't. In many instances, the sanctity or the integrity of the household register was really quite intact. It depended upon sometimes the sophistication of the person who was reading it. You would see perhaps an IR-1 case, the wife of an American citizen, always a military guy, who had come in, and she would bring her household register. We'd be talking about her parents, and I would be looking at her household register, and I would see that her parents had three children, one born in '38, one born in '40, one born in '42, and then the woman in front of me. Then we would have this woman who was born in '57, with no births recorded or stillbirths, nothing. Nothing in between. So I would sit and talk to her about this, and I'd say, “Gee, how many brothers and sisters do you have?”

“I have these three that were born.”

And I said, “And then 17 years later you were born? You were born when your mother was 55? Oh, yes.” So finally, I would just say, “All right, now. No one's going anywhere until I get the straight story. Who is your real mother and father?”

“This lady is my real mother and father, the one in the household register.”

I said, “It cannot be. It would truly be exceptional if this were the case, and I don't think this is the case. Who were your real mother and father?”

So then you'd go around and around, using Korean terms. Was this the blood mother? Was this the milk mother? Whatever. Invariably, finally, after about five minutes of haggling, it would turn out that the woman listed on the household register as the mother was the adopted mother, that this was perhaps a niece, this was the daughter of the family down the street who had too many children, they couldn't afford to raise this one, so the friends up the street took her in. Or whatever. She regarded the woman on the family register as her mother. She was raised by that woman, but she was not her natural mother.

So then we would have her sign some sort of standard form at the time saying, “I acknowledge that this woman named such and such listed in my household register as my mother is not my mother, and will therefore not be eligible for subsequent IR-5 benefits,” meaning emigrating as the mother of an American citizen. Once the woman in my office became an American citizen, she would not have the right to turn around and petition for this “informal” mother as her mother. That paper became part of her permanent file.

Q: Later on, within the consular section, there had always been somewhat of a suspicion of perhaps some malfeasance and fraud within the consular section. But the time you were there, particularly early on, what was the feeling of the officers about this?

RASPOLIC: I think the officers felt that something wasn't quite right, and there were small indications of it here and there. But I think also the officers bent over backwards trying

not to judge the Korean staff by American ethical standards, in the sense that it was too easy to blame the Koreans if things weren't quite proper. How did we know? Maybe it was American staff members who were involved in malfeasance, or maybe it was something else. I don't think any of us had enough experience, frankly, to understand what the ramifications were of what was going on. But there were instances.

I don't know if you remember, Stu, there was a case with Mr. Kang, one of the chief local employees in the IV section. I was doing an IV. I've forgotten what it was all about, but I remember thinking it was kind of strange at the time. I went ahead and approved the issuance. The procedure at the time was that we would interview in the morning, and sometimes interviews would spill over into the afternoon, and then those who were approved would come back after 4:00 or so to pick up their visas. So I interviewed the case and then put it in the “approved” box, then interviewed a couple more cases. When I was finished doing my interviews, I was standing at the counter where we had the cases waiting for the papers prepared for interviewing officers to pick one up off the top of the stack. I found a couple of strange loose papers, and I thought the name looked familiar. I looked at them, and it was a couple of congressionals with replies, and they all had to do with the case that I had interviewed and approved that morning. It was quite clear that these papers had been purposely detached from the case, and that simply was not standard procedure. All of that package should have come in to me so that I could have reviewed it all before I interviewed, and known what previous questions had been raised, what had been answered and what had not yet been answered.

So I took it to Mr. Kang, who was in charge of the IV workroom. I said, “Mr. Kang, what's this?” He said he didn't know. He thought it was rather strange. So at that point, I think we were all very sensitive to what might be going on, so I took it in to Mary Ann Newman, who supervised the IV unit, and then we both went in to you. Then Ed Lee, who was the security officer, came down and was interviewing everyone, and he interviewed Mr. Kang. Then I was called in again for a formal interview.

Apparently Mr. Kang claimed to Ed Lee that this was standard procedure, that all congressional inquiries were detached from the interview papers. I said, “That's garbage. That's absolute garbage. If this is standard procedure, this is the first time. It's honored in the breach, because every other case I've ever had has always had the congressional correspondence attached. So clearly, when I put two and two together, we suspended action on the case and did not issue the visa that day. We ultimately turned down the case. Whatever the problem was, the man had not yet resolved the problem, and it was quite obvious that Kang had been paid off or approached.

Q: Kang was one of the first people who was fired. We called in an investigation because there was so much of this type of thing going on.

Q: One last thing I'd like to ask you about in the operation in Seoul. You came back to the American Services section.

RASPOLIC: Yes, I did. That was after NIV, also.

Q: Let's talk about NIV.

RASPOLIC: NIV was educational. (Laughs)

Q: Would you explain how this was educational.

RASPOLIC: Because I heard a lot of very, very interesting reasons as to why people should go to the United States that simply had no relationship to reality. What we had were people who claimed to be in business, although quite often when we tried to check and use the telephone numbers they gave us on their visa application form, there was no such business. The general line, the party line, was they had to go to the United States to do a market survey, and the market survey was never going to take less than six months, and they were always going to go to Los Angeles, Dallas, Atlanta, Washington, New York, and San Francisco. There was this circuit. Invariably, the affidavit of support was from a

Korean American—well, we hoped they were Korean American; they may well have been another Korean citizen—living in Flushing. Bill Duffy and I again worked together in NIVs, and we used to think that there were a series of yoguans, Korean hotels, in Flushing, because everyone seemed to have the same address or lived within a six-square-block area. (Laughs)

We also saw a fair number of retired Korean military types who suddenly decided that their lives could not proceed without having an MBA usually from some storefront operation on Wilshire Boulevard. It was quite clear that these people were trying to use our non-immigrant visas for purposes other than what they stated.

They oftentimes were blocked IV cases, a case where perhaps they had an aunt and uncle in the United States who were American citizens, but the person in front of me applying for the NIV, if it was his mother who was the sister of an American citizen, this fellow's mother had died, therefore he could not benefit from P-5 status. Therefore, the only way to get into the United States would be through a non-immigrant visa, and obviously the aunt and uncle in the States weren't going to let him come back.

Q: Were these easy to refuse?

RASPOLIC: No, it's never easy. Well, some of the more blatant ones are easier to refuse, but it's not easy. I don't think any NIV officer takes the idea lightly to refuse someone when you're very conscious of your decision really affecting the life of the person opposite you, that their life will take a different turn from that point on. If they're going to pursue higher education and they're going to pursue it outside Korea, then it's got to be in a third country; it's not going to be in the United States. Or if they're going to see Aunt Minnie again, it's going to have to be elsewhere. Aunt Minnie's going to have to come back here, or they're going to have to meet in a third country. There's no way that this person qualifies for a visa, given the terms of our law, whatever it is at the time.

Contrary to popular belief in some countries, I don't think consular officers get their kicks out of refusing people. I don't think they get some fiendish glee that appears when they refuse people. I think consular officers really, by and large, take their responsibilities quite seriously. They're there to administer the law. I think precious few consular officers agree with our law or think that it's the finest law there is. I personally think our immigration laws are one of the most convoluted, nonsensical laws that I've ever seen. But if you're going to take on the responsibility for administering it, then you've got to administer it. You don't have the luxury of picking and choosing which parts of the law you will uphold or which parts you will close one eye to; you just have got to go with it.

Q: Were there pressures on you on refusing some cases, either from people above, including myself, or from the rest of the embassy, from Congress, from outside?

RASPOLIC: On occasion. There was one very prominent Korean family, they were very successful commercially, and they had business subsidiaries in the United States. It was amazing, but each subsidiary was run by one of their children. Their son, who was running their office in New York, wanted to bring in a maid. The maid had not worked in Korea for the son for the minimum of one year, which was required at that time by the law. So I refused the maid, and I refused her twice. The next thing I knew, Miss Kim, one of the three Miss Kims in the NIV section, the senior Miss Kim came running in one day about 11:30, and she said I had an invitation to lunch that day. I said, “Really? I'm not aware of it.”

She said Mrs. Kim, who was the mother of the fellow in New York, who normally socialized only with the Ambassador, if she bothered to socialize with the Ambassador, had invited me to lunch, and lunch was at 12:30, and here was the address. I told our Miss Kim to call the Mrs. Kim and thank her most graciously for her invitation, but that I was not available. And Miss Kim just thought I was crazy. She said, “How could you refuse this woman? She's the Mrs. Kim!” I politely explained to our NIV employee that it was not me who was being invited to lunch; it was my visa machine, and I wasn't going to be part of the game.

If they wanted a maid for their son, there were plenty of maids available in New York City. Otherwise, don't bother me or waste my time. (Laughs) So I ate lunch in the cafeteria that day.

There were other cases. I remember the political counselor at the time, on occasion would come down and promote various cases. I would have to really basically educate him in our law.

Q: I recall one time there was an Army colonel in my office when he came in, and I got into it. I don't usually, but I actually got into a shouting match with our political counselor on that. It is a problem, because they see the non-immigrant visa often as a tool.

RASPOLIC: Absolutely.

Q: And it is. If it can be used correctly and legally, it can be a very good way of helping your colleagues in the political section.

RASPOLIC: Oftentimes, not just in Korea, but elsewhere, if I saw that someone else in the embassy was interested in a case, and if the case was clearly issuable, I would call up the person who was interested in the case and tell them I was going to issue it, but let them make the brownie points for having issued the case. Because I had no interest in making brownie points; either I issued it or I didn't issue it. I was used to being able to sleep either way. But if they wanted to make some points from it, fine, and I was perfectly willing to help them out in that case, or even to alert them in advance of some cases that they weren't even aware of or hadn't been approached about, so they might be able to gain some points.

Q: This was one of the advantages of having compound living and all that. There was more contact.

RASPOLIC: Right. On our compound, I was really quite close to people in USIS, people in AID, people in both political and econ sections, so it worked out well.

Q: It was a large section, and I made efforts to have staff meetings from time to time. How did you feel that the section communicated internally? Did it work or didn't it work?

RASPOLIC: Actually, I think it worked exceptionally well. I think also we were very lucky —at least I was very lucky when I was there—in that the particular combination of JOs [junior officers]—and we all were basically JOs, except for Mary Ann Newman and Olin Whittemore, I believe were the only experienced officers. John St. Denis had had previous tours, but not as a consular officer. John lived out in Yongsan, so he didn't socialize with us as much. Most of us were single. There were a couple of married couples, but I don't think anyone had any children, and we were all in Compound Two. So we all just ran around together in the evenings, and on the weekends, we worked together during the day. Most of us have stayed in touch, and we get together quite often. I just went to a dinner party two weeks ago with compound two people. We got along together exceptionally well, and I think the section was quite cohesive.

Q: So the communication and all was spread around.

RASPOLIC: Yes.

Q: When you went back to American Services, there was this rather peculiar system of using the notarial as a way of screening out fraudulent marriages. Do you recall that? An American who was going to marry a Korean would have to come in and swear.

RASPOLIC: Yes. That was for the person who was filing a fianc# petition, I think. It wasn't the marriage so much; it was the fianc# petitions. We would do preliminary interviews before we would approve the petition and send it on to INS.

Q: Could you explain some of the problems with this?

RASPOLIC: It was really very interesting, because some of the Koreans found that if they could find an American citizen who was willing to file a fianc# petition, then if that was approved by INS, then the beneficiary of the petition would come in, we would interview them. At that point, they would be interviewed by non-immigrant visa people, because a fianc# visa was a non-immigrant visa. If that visa were issued, then the terms of the visa required that the beneficiary enter the United States and then marry the petitioner within 90 days of entrance. If they didn't marry, then the beneficiary was to immediately depart the United States and return to Korea.

Some of the more shady applicants would regard the fianc# petition as a way of getting someone into the United States. They might marry, they might not marry, but at least they were in. If they married, it was generally just a marriage of convenience for those people, and then after an appropriate period of time, they would divorce and each party would go off and do their own thing.

So before the petition was filed, before we would sign off and approve the petition, we would do a preliminary interview. We would ask that both the petitioner and beneficiary be interviewed and be in the country at the same time, and we would interview each one of them separately. We would ask all sorts of questions that I suppose were something of an infringement upon one's privacy, but we sort of got down to brass tacks very early in the game. If it looked like the couple really did know each other, if they had been living together for quite some time, if there was reason to believe that they really were going to marry in the States, that's fine. We were not trying to pass moral judgment on their living arrangements. That was not our intent. What we were trying to do was sort out the couples where the petitioner was being paid by the beneficiary to file the petition, to, in effect, provide a means for illegal immigration into the United States.

We had this one couple that, my God, they'd been interviewed I don't know how many times, and none of us would approve a petition. It was really wild. As I recall, it was an American woman from Guam. Any case that came from Guam, we were immediately

suspect of, anyway. This was an American woman from Guam who must have weighed 300 pounds, absolutely homely as sin, never had been married. At least according to her, she had never been married. Who knows what the Guam civil records had. But she was petitioning for some sleaze-bag bar owner out in Itaewon, who had been married three or four times, but never to an American. It was clear—it was clear—that this guy in Itaewon was paying this woman in Guam to file the petition. They would come in, we would interview them, then they would raise holy hell when we didn't approve it. They would just cause a huge ruckus out in the waiting room, and we'd always have to have them escorted out. They'd show up again three or four months later, hoping that a new change in personnel in the consular section would help them out.

We would ask questions like, “What kind of work do you do? What is your normal pattern of life? What time do you wake up in the morning? When do you go to bed? Where do you shop? Where do you eat? What's the layout of your house? What colors are the rooms?” Some of these questions were things that probably INS uses when they do interviews back here. In fact, probably some INS people came along and helped us put together some questions, I think, at one point. (Laughs) “Do you have any pets? What are their names? How old are they? Do you have any children? Does he have any children? How many times has he been married? How many times have you been married?” Back and forth. Things that were usually rather quantifiable and things that the other people either knew or didn't know. It was amazing how much the other person didn't know! (Laughs) We would catch them up on some very funny things sometimes. Sometimes the interviews were embarrassing.

My Korean was certainly not good enough to conduct that kind of interview in Korean. When I did straight NIV interviews, if the interpreter would ask the question, I could always understand the answer, so we wouldn't have to have the answer translated. We'd just proceed to the next question. But in this kind of interview, I had to be very careful of both the question and the answer, so I would use the interpreter, Mr. Kim. And poor Mr. Kim, he would be mortified at some of the questions I was asking! (Laughs) You could always

tell, he would be off looking in the distance, looking down. But he would faithfully translate these things. He was equally appalled by some of the answers, I know.

Q: You mentioned ministers were a problem. Why were they a problem?

RASPOLIC: Frankly, they were a problem because of our law. Our law permitted ministers to qualify for a certain category of immigrant visas, but the problem was in determining how to identify a minister, how to qualify as a minister. Did you have to have a flock of a certain size? Did you have to represent a church that was well known in both countries? What size was your congregation here? What size would your congregation be in the United States? Did you have pastoral training?

It became a problem for us, because at one point, some “entrepreneurs,” I think, discovered that it was perhaps easier to get a minister's visa than, for example, a civil engineer's visa. (Laughs) So all of a sudden, you had some rather strange credentials showing up to prove that X applicant was a minister of religion. I must say, we reached the point where we were trying to be consistent in the way the section dealt with them, certainly, because we always wanted to be as consistent as we could, but there really weren't that many minister applicants. So we didn't see them all day, every day. We decided that it was best to have one person handle them, so all of the junior officers voted to have Mary Ann Newman handle them. (Laughs) She was chief of the section. So Mary Ann was the one who became quite adept at sorting out a real honest-to-God minister as opposed to a fly-by-night.

Q: To close off the Korean side, what did you think about consular work by that time? You'd gotten certainly a full dose of consular work.

RASPOLIC: I still was relatively enthusiastic about it. I was much more interested in the management side of it toward the end, and I was much more interested in running my own section. Basically, I had had a reasonable amount of management experience before I came into the Foreign Service. My first tour, it was a very small post, granted, but at least I

did run my own section. I had to change some gears to go into a large section such as we had in Seoul, and not be anywhere near in charge of it. (Laughs)

On the other hand, I went to Seoul because I regarded it as a learning post, and I wanted to be exposed to the cases that I was exposed to in Seoul. I learned a hell of a lot in Seoul. I had cases all day long, every day in Seoul that at most other posts you would see once or twice a year. This was very useful to me later on in subsequent years. For one thing, the last six months I was in Seoul, I was not in the consular section; I was a staff aide up in the ambassador's office, which also gave me a different perspective on consular work, because I could see the kind of pressures that other sections of the embassy were under.

Anyway, at that point I wanted to continue in consular work, but wanted to run my own section.

Q: Your next post was Ethiopia. You went there when?

RASPOLIC: July of 1978 to July of 1980.

Q: You were essentially the consular officer there.

RASPOLIC: Right. For one thing, I was the main consular officer. I had some help from a political officer who used to come in and help me with NIV interviews from time to time.

Q: Could you describe the political situation in Ethiopia when you were there, and what you were doing?

RASPOLIC: I got there toward the end of the Red and White terror. I must say the revolution had been three or four years beforehand. There had been sporadic uprisings since then. When I arrived, the first week that I was there, my predecessor was still in town, and so I was very graciously invited to all of his farewell parties.

I went to one downtown in an apartment building really about two blocks away from the building that I ultimately ended up living in, and it was a buffet. We were maybe on the third or fourth floor. We were all standing in line, waiting to serve ourselves at the buffet table, and there was gunfire out in the piazza, out on the square. The hostess dropped to the floor, crawled over to the French doors that opened onto this tiny little terrace, closed the French doors, turned around and urged her guests to fill their plates! (Laughs) I was sort of standing there thinking, “Oh, my God! What have I gotten myself into this time?”

I must say it all went uphill from there. It was relatively calm, although the Ethiopian public was generally very ill at ease and quite concerned about civil unrest.

It was the second country in a row where I had served where there was a curfew. We had curfew from midnight until 5:00. They were quite serious about it. In Korea, sometimes with diplomatic plates and smiling graciously at the guards, you could get by if you were 15 or 20 minutes late getting home. Not in Addis. In Addis, they were serious about it, and they would start shooting. So you just simply left wherever you were at 11:30 to allow yourself time to get home in case you had a flat tire, which was also very common in Ethiopia. (Laughs)

We were not permitted to travel outside of Shoa Province, where Addis is, and I'm not sure, that might still be the case. The government explanation for this was that it was for our own safety, that they could not guarantee our safety if we went any further. I think in some instances, that might have been true, but in other instances, I think it was just more convenient for them.

The country is amazingly poor. I think to a certain extent they simply didn't want us to see what the conditions were in the countryside. Once during my second year there, the Minister of Foreign Affairs organized a trip only for diplomats to Lalibela, which is a city in the north. It's not exactly in the north, but it certainly is halfway north. It's a city well known for its churches carved from rock. It's absolutely beautiful. We went by jeep. It took us two,

two and a half days to get there. We had to take all of our food and all of our water, even for the time that we were in Lalibela. The ministry sent a plane in to pick us up, and we were there for a couple of days and came back. It was fascinating, well worthwhile, lots of fun.

Consular work there was very, very interesting. Our staff at the embassy had been cut down considerably in 1974. USIS had been thrown out, the DAO [Defense Attach#'s Office] had been thrown out. AID had been cut back tremendously. So I think with the Marine guard, there were only 30, 32 of us or so. First there was a charg#. I think we were between ambassadors. Then Ambassador Chapin came out. He left after I left, actually, but when he left, he was never replaced by another ambassador. There's still, to this day, only a charg#.

Officially the relations between the two countries were not terribly friendly and, in fact, at times became quite aggravated. But unofficially, the man on the street, people were extremely friendly. People were very supportive of the Americans.

Q: What were your major jobs in the consular section?

RASPOLIC: Visas were minimal. This was primarily due to the fact that most Ethiopian citizens did not have permission to travel. They could not get passports from the new regime, which ultimately was to my benefit, frankly, because it left me much more time to deal with ACS cases, and I had some humdingers of ACS cases.

Q: Why would you have American Citizen Services cases?

RASPOLIC: What I had was a very interesting kind of case. I had two main groups of American citizens still in country. I don't think I had more than 50 or 75 American citizens in the entire country. They were either missionaries who had been there for years and years and years, and certainly weren't going to let Lieutenant Colonel Haile Mariam Mengistu force them out. Until he wanted them out, they could stay. Some of them really

were providing wonderful service. We had working missionaries. These were not people necessarily spending full time proselytizing; these were people who were working as physicians, as veterinarians, as teachers, what have you. They really performed some admirable services for the Ethiopia.

The others were much more of a problem to me, but a fascinating problem. They were generally American women who were married to Ethiopian citizens. Generally they all followed the same pattern. They had met their husbands while they were in the U.S., both attending universities together, fell in love, married, went back to Ethiopia, had lived there for X number of years, anywhere from five to 15 or so years. Now they wanted out. The husbands, generally, because they were foreign educated and well educated, had relatively responsible positions either in government offices or in private industry. The husbands couldn't get out, not if it was known that they wanted out. Their permission to travel would also be taken away. So invariably, what would happen is, particularly those who worked for the government, they would be sent abroad to attend a conference, and then they would skip, leaving the wife and children and the home in Ethiopia. The wife and children were documented as American citizens, but they could not get exit visas because the Ethiopian Government would not forgive the husband for having skipped.

So that's when the friendly consular officer would come in and say, “You can't do that. These people are American citizens.” We would go round and round and round. I finally got it down to a science, and I sort of sent the informal word out to those who were still in country, saying, “If you're planning to do this, for God's sakes please come in and see me beforehand. We'll talk very low key, we'll talk elsewhere. I'll meet you for tea in the piazza. I don't care, but let me tell you what you must do before your husband leaves town, because we've got to try and play this as best we can to your benefit.” And it worked out quite well. By the end of the second year, we had things moving rather freely.

What would happen is that in those cases where they hadn't come to see me, the husband would leave town, the wife would be there. In one instance, I remember the family had just

a lovely, lovely home that they had built themselves, had an architect come in and design, well furnished. They had a very comfortable life. The wife wanted to leave. She wanted to sell the home, sell the furnishings, and leave. They would not let her sell the home, sell the furnishings. The Kebele, which was the local political action unit that covered that square mile or whatever, was confiscating all the contents of the house. The government would not let them transfer title on the house. They'd frozen the bank account. The government was claiming that the family had to pay the government the equivalent of the husband's salary for the entire year, because they would be losing the services of the husband. They would make up these things as the case progressed, all these obstacles.

I ended up going with the wife to each one of these checkpoints, primarily with Public Security, arguing the case, arguing on behalf of the woman, saying, “You can't do that. You can't do this. This woman has a brother-in-law here in town. She will transfer the house to the brother-in-law, not to the government. You have no right to come in and confiscate all the contents of the house. You have taken this women's personal belongings that she purchased. She was working also. She purchased half this stuff. She's still here. You have no right to confiscate her personal effects.” We were going round and round and round.

Of course, they had every right to do whatever they wanted! We had no bilateral treaty with them. But I would go in and argue. So we would get into some wild discussions.

I had one very interesting case, the daughter of a very prominent symphony conductor here in the States who had married an Ethiopian, and she was wonderful. She should be on stage, because we would go into the Public Security Bureau office. She and her husband really had nothing. They lived in a rented apartment, they had very few things, and whatever they had, they had borrowed in the first place. The Kebele could confiscate whatever they wanted; there was nothing there to have. Still, they wouldn't give her an exit visa. So we had it down to a science. I would go in and give my five-minute spiel, and then I would say, “Jenny, take it away.” And Jenny would burst into tears. (Laughs) We

would go through this, and I'd say, “Look at this grief and aggravation you're causing this American citizen. You can't do this!”

So finally, it took us about two or three months to get her out. There really were no physical possessions that we were arguing about, no money. We finally got her out, but it was wild. So we had serious cases like that.

Some of the cases are still there. Some of the people just refused to leave, actually.

Q: What sort of pressure were you getting from Washington on this?

RASPOLIC: Very little.

Q: Surprising.

RASPOLIC: Very little. I was quite surprised, too, particularly after coming from Korea, where there oftentimes was congressional interest expressed in a case. I was delighted, frankly, because it made my life a lot easier. I think that the whole problem of congressional interest in a case has been carried to absolutely ludicrous extremes. If you devote the man hours among congressional staff members that are being devoted to immigration cases, you could probably staff a subsidiary of INS. Why doesn't INS just put an office on the Hill? It's a waste of their manpower and it's a waste of our time overseas, and I think it is a terrible misuse of the system primarily by recent immigrants or even illegal aliens who write to the congressmen. And the congressmen's staff can't even sort out who's illegal and who isn't. I think it's a terrible waste of their time and our time. But I'm digressing.

Q: That was your main task in Ethiopia?

RASPOLIC: Yes. I spent an inordinate amount of time on it. I did issue some immigrant visas, but not to Ethiopian citizens, generally to Armenians who had immigrated to Ethiopia years ago and who were now trying to get out, and this was their only way out. There were

some Ethiopian immigrant visas that I issued, but I had to develop a new twist in that I could issue them in Ethiopia, but I couldn't give them to these people and have them hand carry them out through the airport, because they would go through customs, their visas would be found, and their passports had not been issued for immigrant purposes.

So what I worked out, with the concurrence of the Department, was that I would issue an immigrant visa. Fortunately, to go through Ethiopia to the United States, you had to transfer some place in Europe, either Athens or Rome or Geneva or wherever. So I would ask the family where they were going, find out where they were going, and make sure they went to a city where we had a post. Then I would issue the immigrant visa far enough in advance so that it could be pouched to that post. Then I would issue the family, in their passports, a tourist visa. I would tell them to take that passport as their identification into the post, and have the NIV canceled, and they would pick up their immigrant visa and then use that to enter the United States. It worked out every time. It certainly wasn't all that frequent, because we weren't issuing that many.

Q: You went to China. What sort of training did you have, and what was your first assignment in China?

RASPOLIC: I had the standard two years of language training, Mandarin, and it was one year at FSI in Rosslyn, and one year at the Department Language School in Taipei, Taiwan. I went from there directly to Guangzhou, where I was chief of the consular section. That's formerly known as Canton. Believe it or not, the British traders, when they came in the mid-19th century, when they heard Guangzhou, supposedly transliterated it as “Canton.” (Laughs) I mean, why not?

Q: What was your job in Guangzhou?

RASPOLIC: As chief of the consular section, I was responsible for supervising a section that handled immigrant visas, non-immigrant visas, and American citizen services.

Including myself, we had nine American officers, one American secretary, and 27 Chinese employees.

Q: That's a huge section.

RASPOLIC: It was a big section.

Q: Was that the main task, really, of our consulate in Guangzhou, would you say?

RASPOLIC: It was certainly a major task as a consulate. Our commercial section was equally busy. There were many American businesses who were interested in business possibilities in southern China, which is where, if you're at all familiar with what's going on in China now, the majority of the innovative economic activity is going on in the southern part of China, in Guangdong and Fujian provinces, directly north of Hong Kong. Our political section really was not as active. Our administrative section was very busy, but mostly administering us, rather than providing a service to the public. So it was primarily consular and commercial.

Q: What were your main functions there in the consular section?

RASPOLIC: Certainly the biggest chunk of our time was taken up with immigrant visas, because traditionally over the years, Americans of Chinese origin came from the southern part of China. Until we normalized relations in 1979, these American citizens were not able to file immigrant visa petitions for their relatives. So there was a tremendous interest and activity in the filing of immigrant visa petitions from 1979 onward.

I was in Guangzhou from August of 1983 until July of 1986. When I was there, we had over 50,000 names on file in our immigrant visa files, people waiting for their petitions to become current so that we could issue visas. Traditionally, Americans of Chinese origin came from the four-county area, which is four counties within Guangdong province, but basically these counties were between Guangzhou and Hong Kong. Keep in mind that

Guangzhou is really only 100 miles north of Hong Kong. So Taishan County and the others were the main sources of immigrants. A tremendous amount of activity.

As the years progressed, we saw more and more immigrants going to the United States as it became easier for them to get their passports and papers in order. We also saw more and more Chinese Americans coming back to visit the homeland to see what relatives were still around. We also began to see more and more retired Chinese Americans coming back to China to retire. Their Social Security checks would certainly go a lot further in China. This was a source of foreign exchange certificates for their family members, and they could live really quite well on their basic Social Security check.

Q: What years are we talking about?

RASPOLIC: 1983 to 1986.

Q: How did you find your staff, both Chinese and American?

RASPOLIC: The American staff, I thought, was really very good, exceptionally good. We were uneven in that we only had myself and one other position designated as an experienced officer. Then we had seven JO positions. But we had been very fortunate during all three of my years in Guangzhou that one of those JO positions was also filled by a second-tour officer. So we did have the luxury of having a third experienced officer to help deal with the JOs, because it's very hard to be a sounding board for seven JOs all day long every day. There are certainly going to be many areas where you simply haven't had as much experience. And sometimes there's not conflict, but sometimes some people communicate more easily than others.

Q: So you need another person.

RASPOLIC: I think to have the section function well, you need at least one other officer. What we tried ultimately to do was upgrade two of the positions. We won the battle but

lost the war, because we upgraded the position, but then we couldn't get any experienced officers worldwide to bid on them. So then we had to fill them with junior officers again! (Laughs)

Q: These all had to be language officers?

RASPOLIC: Yes, but under the terms of the new Foreign Service Act, a junior officer is not offered the opportunity to have any more than six months language training before they can be tenured. So what we would do was send people off for either six months of Mandarin, or we also experimented and sent three or four officers for six months in Cantonese. We had them get off language probation on the basis of that, and using those six months, those officers who were interested in it had no problem at all in taking care of their work in Chinese, and many of them really became quite adept at handling interviews in a lot of the other dialects that were used in the area. The JOs are a constant source of amazement to me. I think they're great.

Q: In Guangzhou, this was your first time, really, in running a section?

RASPOLIC: Other than the very small section in Addis Ababa, where I had one part-time American employee and two full-time Ethiopian employees, until we fired one.

Q: How well did you feel you were prepared at this point to run really a very large section?

RASPOLIC: I felt probably that the State Department had not prepared me to run it, but that I had had sufficient previous experience in the Peace Corps that I could run it. I suppose the largest group I had ever been responsible for was when I was regional director in Thailand and had 120 Peace Corps volunteers in my region that I was responsible for. Granted, I didn't have them all around me every day, but they were all over the countryside. Still, I was reasonably familiar with some of the problems.

Q: Were you consul general Guangzhou?

RASPOLIC: No. Because it was a constituent post, the principal officer was the consul general. I was the chief of the consular section.

Q: What did you see as your principal job?

RASPOLIC: My principal job was really a management job, not a consular job. I felt that my principal job was to see that the section opened for business every day and got through the business day in as smooth and as efficient and as legal a manner as we possibly could. That was the basis of the daily operations, and from then on I would try to work with various officers whom I felt were interested in special projects. We had all sorts of special projects going all the time. Somebody was doing research on how a Chinese cook could qualify for P-6 status; someone else would be doing a special project on how to interview for fraud in a country that wouldn't let you go out and do field interviews for fraud. Things like this. Trying to utilize various officers' special interests and keep them occupied.

Q: I don't mean this term pejoratively, but would you make up these special projects?

RASPOLIC: No, no, not at all. Not at all. Usually the special project would come about because we would have requests from perhaps INS in Hong Kong, saying, “We've got a real problem with P-6 cooks. How are we going to deal with it?” So then I'd sit down and we'd have one of our weekly staff meetings. We'd sit around and shoot the breeze about how could we approach it. Somebody would say, “Listen, who's been out talking to the public health officials about how you qualify, how are you licensed in China to be a cook?” Then somebody would say, “Gee, I met somebody the other day who might be able to give me a hand on that. Let me look into it.” It would start that way. It would not be any kind of make-work project at all.

Q: Were the junior officers ready to do this type of work, or did they need quite a bit of guidance?

RASPOLIC: It varied so much from officer to officer. I found most of them were really quite ready, and they had gone through the ConGen Rosslyn course, which seemed to be relatively successful, I must say, much more so than I felt my training had been. There were always exceptions. (Laughs) There were several officers whom I don't think performed as well as one would have hoped, and I don't think it was necessarily Guangzhou; I basically felt that they perhaps weren't really right for the Foreign Service, and maybe Guangzhou brought it all out a lot sooner than an easier post would have done.

Q: What were the pressures on you and your staff?

RASPOLIC: Basically, it was not traditional kinds of pressures. We had pressures to issue visas, yes, but in Guangzhou, people spend a lot more time feeling sorry for themselves, I think, and you had to watch among the JOs not to let them feel sorry for themselves. It is not a pleasant post by any means.

Q: Feeling sorry for themselves in what manner?

RASPOLIC: The city is not a comfortable city. It is not all that charming. It's a very commercial city that you can see the main sites of within the first 45 minutes that you're there, but you're there for two years or 18 months or three years, it depends on your tour. So what are you going to do with the rest of the time? It's too easy to say, “I'll go to Hong Kong every weekend.” You can catch the train Friday night and come back on Sunday afternoon, and have a very pleasant weekend in Hong Kong, but that's sort of living with one foot in each country, really giving Guangzhou short-shrift.

One of our biggest problems was our facilities in Guangzhou. We were in a hotel, the Dong Fang Hotel. For the first two years that I was there, our office was there and our living quarters. I lived in two hotel rooms in Guangzhou.

Then the third year that I was there, we moved into a marvelous apartment complex. It was really just very lovely. It was a joint venture built by Chinese construction workers with Hong Kong architects, and it was really very nice. But that was the third year.

Our offices continued all that time to be in the Dong Fang Hotel. The consular section was on the ground floor. We had absolutely no security, which bothered us from time to time very much. The first year that I was there, I managed to expand the offices. There was the hotel Sauna that was located next to us, and the hotel was building a new sports complex on another corner of the compound, so this space became available. So we got permission from the embassy to rent it, and we expanded our consular section, which almost doubled our floor space and made a big difference. But we were on the ground floor.

There was a lot of foot traffic outside, a lot of noise. We had no natural light at all, because for security reasons, we had to cover up the glass windows leading out to the courtyard on the interior side. On the exterior side it was just cement brick wall anyway. We had rats in the ceiling, we had cats in the ceiling. In fact, one day a cat fell through the ceiling; it was fighting one of the rats.

We had fleas in the carpeting. In fact, at one point we used to have the exterminators come in, and I really am still, to this day, concerned about what they used to exterminate the fleas with, because we would have to leave. We could not work. Everybody always used to work late in Guangzhou, particularly when we lived in the Dong Fang. There was nothing else to do, so we would work late. We would always have to leave on time the day the exterminators were coming in, because this stuff really was very potent.

We used to also worry about the Dong Fang employees who came in and used their electrical equipment to spread this disinfectant, or whatever it was, because they only had a little gauze mask on. I really was concerned about whether this stuff was eating up their lungs or not.

We had huge roaches, huge water bugs. Not until we expanded the office space did we have a staff toilet, men's room, ladies' room. Before that, we had to leave the office and go out and use either the public facilities that belonged to the hotel or go to your own quarters on another floor, go back to your own apartment and use the john. (Laughs) It really was very unique.

We had a tremendous problem with administration the first year that I was there. I was there for three years, and we had four administrative officers. The first three were the first year that I was there, and then the fourth one came, and he stayed for two years. He was a godsend. He was very, very easy to work with.

Q: The other ones just said to hell with it and left?

RASPOLIC: The first one was fired for having his hand in the till, not at that post, but at his previous post. The second two were TDYers, temporary-duty people, sent out to help out until they found some poor soul who was willing to come out. Then the fourth one came on regular assignment.

That's fine and dandy for the rest of the post, but you can't operate a consular section that's issuing 15,000, 16,000 immigrant visas a year unless we know damn well we're going to have forms. We used forms galore. I mean, we had not only just plain immigrant visa issuance forms, but a large variety of application forms. We had all the forms that we sent to people when we scheduled their appointments. We had lots of forms, some of them required by the Department, some of them local forms. But we couldn't operate without these forms.

We also had the problem with our Chinese staff in that we had to train them. They were not accustomed to working in a Western office, and they were not our employees. They were employees of the Diplomatic Service Bureau who were assigned to us. They were actually dragooned from their own work units, sent to the Diplomatic Service Bureau, and

then assigned to us. So their allegiance was clearly not to us. We would try and tell them what our expectations were, and we would have training sessions for them, but there were certain American concepts that were very hard to get through to them. One of them was, “Please, when you're using a form, don't come to me when you are down to the last form in the last box. Tell me when you're down to the next to the last box of 1,000 each. Give me a fighting chance to get some more printed or Xeroxed or something or other!” But that continues to this day to be a problem in China. Planning ahead is not rewarded, I guess. I don't know. I don't know what it is, but it made it very difficult.

Ultimately, I had to establish the consular section's administrative subsection. When we expanded our office, we purposely built in a huge storeroom, and we kept all of our forms down there, separating them out from the main consulate storeroom, so that we knew what we had and what was needed to be reordered. We set up our own inventory system. I hired a British woman whose husband was temporarily in Guangzhou with one of the oil companies, and she was one of the best things that ever happened to us, because she was terribly well organized. She set up a very easy-to-deal-with and very comprehensive inventory card system, and worked with the Chinese employees on how to keep it up to date.

Q: There's no thought of moving into the electronic field in visa issuance, inventory, and all that?

RASPOLIC: Not in inventory. We have gone to IVACS, the automated visa issuance system in Guangzhou. We made all the arrangements for it while I was still there. I left in July of 1986, and the system actually went into effect in Guangzhou, I believe, late that fall, in September or October, when the training team had come out from the Department.

Q: With all the problems there, you could still run a system like that?

RASPOLIC: Yes. With all the problems in Guangzhou, oddly enough, electrical supply was not one of them. The electrical supply was never intermittent at all; it was quite constant,

number one. Number two, with the installation of IVACS, we got an additional position in Guangzhou, and that was a systems person, AIS, automated information system. That person's main role was to keep the IVACS system in the IV section, and also to service all the WANGs that we had in the other sections. We only had WANGs installed in Guangzhou. WANG is a type of word processing. We only had that system made available to us in Guangzhou, I believe, no more than one year before, probably late 1985 or early '86. We reluctantly moved into the 20th century. (Laughs)

Q: Besides the immigrant visas, were there other problems?

RASPOLIC: Sure. We had non-immigrant visa that were relatively active, although it was really only the third largest issuing post in China. Most people in Guangzhou will tend to wait for their immigrant visa turn to come up. There certainly are bad NIV cases and applications in Guangzhou, but it could be a lot worse than it is, I must say.

We also had an American Citizen Services section. We had more and more retirees coming to live there, and they would come in and register. We had some American students who had come to study. We had certainly a lot of American tourists coming through, and we would have several very important tourist sites located in our consular district. When we had death cases, invariably they would be up there and not down in Guangzhou. As I say, Guangzhou itself is not very scenic, so tourists would come and make connections on their way to Hong Kong, and they'd stay overnight, if that.

We had an anti-fraud officer, and the anti-fraud officer was the only position like that authorized for China. We kept that person busy. We rotated our JOs in Guangzhou, so we tried to give them as much experience as we could, and we also tried to keep them from being bored. They all seemed to like the AFU position. The AFU position gave some of them some very creative leeway. They devised new systems.

Q: This interview is for people who may be dealing with the consular operation. One of the big things is to try to rotate officers and keep them having fun, or at least to keep them from being bored in some of the more routine things.

RASPOLIC: Yes. If you're going to be running a section with lots of JOs, you have to be concerned with their careers and training them for what comes next. Then you've got to sort out among the JOs who has already said that he or she is going to be in the consular cone, and who is in another cone. We tried to give consular-cone people as broad experience as we can, because even if it's only a month doing this and you don't do it again for two tours, you will think back and remember and absorb some of this experience, and it will surface again later to the benefit of the Department.

If the person is just paying their dues as a one-time consular officer, then they're going off to make their mark as an econ or admin or political officer, we certainly tried to provide more experience for them, but probably they won't get as much as a consular-cone officer.

What we tried to do was split a JO's tour. First of all, we tried to split the JO's tour, I think, probably too frequently. They had 18 months. We said, “We'll divide it into four sectors. Two of those sectors will be in immigrant visa, since that's the bulk of our work. The other will be either NIVs or AFU or ACS. We'll just see how it works out. You'll have the luck of the draw.” I would work it all out tentatively in pencil and take it around and talk to each one of them, see if they could live with it. If they wanted some changes, we'd see what we could do.

It turned out, frankly, that I thought it seemed to be working reasonably well, but some of the JOs felt that we were rotating too frequently, because they felt they were just getting a handle on the new assignment, and then they'd be moved out into another section. So we said, “Okay.” Then we made it three rotations rather than four throughout the tour, and that seemed to work out best for everyone concerned.

Q: Was the section able to make much contribution to the political or economic reporting?

RASPOLIC: As the section, yes, I think, because we tried to encourage the JOs to do some reporting for the other sections. One of our officers, who started off as an admin cone officer, now has an econ assignment in the economic bureau here in the Department, and he's switching cones to econ. He used to do some econ reporting for the econ section while he was in the consular section in Guangzhou. Some of his reporting would be based on things that came up during the course of interviews with Chinese citizens over visa matters, and some of them would just be based on his reporting on economic activities that were highlighted in the local press, and some of it would then be tied in with some field work, perhaps, that he had done. He was an excellent reporter.

We had other officers who did non-consular reporting. One fellow did quite a long and very interesting piece on Muslims in Guangzhou. We had another officer who was admin cone, who did quite a bit of food-market research and tried to chart the course of a mild inflation that was going on, watching the price of various things as the prices invariably went up. The prices never seemed to go down.

Q: No! (Laughs)

RASPOLIC: I think maybe the world wasn't waiting with anxious breath for some of our reporting, but we did try to give the JOs non-consular experience also.

Also I tried to make sure that the JOs were involved when important people came to town and we had to set up control rooms or whatever. I must say, in three years in Guangzhou, we only had two CODELs [congressional delegations], so you can see. But on the other hand, we did have Vice President Bush come through town. We closed the consular section for a day, other than we had one officer handling emergency ACS cases, and that was it. We felt we could not close that, but we certainly closed everything else. That officer who was handling the ACS cases was actually writing thank-you notes for the Vice

President at the same time. (Laughs) Everyone else was down in the control room and working very hard.

We also set up a series of orientation trips for the JOs to travel in China. We used our travel budget that way. This was all on official business. We would send them to the embassy for two days to see how the consular section there functioned, and then to the other consulates for a day each, to see how they functioned there. So it worked out very, very well, I think. We always knew whose turn it was next to go on the orientation trips.

Q: It sounds like you had a well-organized program for the care and feeding of the young officers.

RASPOLIC: We tried. You never succeed with all of them, and you never get through to all of them, but I think we did pretty well, considering what we had to work with.

Q: How did you get along with the local officials there from the consular group?

RASPOLIC: Quite well. I think we had a reasonably healthy relationship. We did not see each other all that often. We really only saw each other when there were problems or at social functions, but our relations were really very, very cordial. I knew that I could always call on them when I did have a problem, and I would always receive a very cooperative response.

We had a very bad ACS case toward the end of my time in Guangzhou, and the ministry people could not have been more helpful.

Q: What was the problem?

RASPOLIC: There was a lady, an American citizen, who was married to a British citizen, and she lived in London. Apparently the lady had a history of psychiatric problems. Of course, hindsight is wonderful. We found this out after the fact. The first thing we knew about her, she was in a town near Guangzhou, about 40 miles west of Guangzhou, called

Foshan. The authorities there were reporting her as perhaps being ill. “Perhaps”—they had her locked up in a hospital in the director's office. And would we please come and investigate.

We sent off one of the JOs to see her. (Laughs) Fortunately, it was a good choice of JOs, which I didn't know at the time; he just happened to be available. He once had worked in Silver Hill, which is a psychiatric institution in Connecticut, so he at least knows a psycho when he sees one! (Laughs)

The lady had come to China to find the inner meaning and inner truth. Someone in her family had died, and she had inherited something like $15,000 or $20,000. She had brought all the money with her to Hong Kong, and had the money transferred into Chinese foreign exchange certificates, of all things, in Hong Kong, transferred directly to the Bank of China in Foshan. For some reason or another, she had read about Foshan before and knew about Foshan, and wanted to go to Foshan. This lady arrived with $20,000 in the bank in Foshan. She probably had more money than the entire city budget, and it was all in her name. She was staying in a hotel, and she then started acting very strangely. She painted a mustache on her face and was parading around the hotel. She'd get undressed in the hotel room with the hotel door open. I mean, not in China! Not in China! No, no, no!

Q: Maybe St. Tropez or something. (Laughs)

RASPOLIC: But not in China, no. I think she stole a table knife. She claimed it was a table knife; the hotel claimed it was a carving knife. Stole it from the kitchen and slept with it under her pillow. Just a series of rather bizarre things. The affect was completely wrong.

So they had put her in a mental institution. The Chinese wanted us to get her out, and we kept saying, “She's an American citizen. We cannot force her to leave. If you want her out, you're going to have to make arrangements to take her.” Under our regulations, we have to protect her rights.

Q: This is an argument that is going on on a daily basis somewhere in the world.

RASPOLIC: Absolutely. As an American citizen, we have to protect her rights, even though she is totally unaware that we're trying to protect her rights. So we went around and around and around. This started in early June. At one point, the Chinese said they would sedate her, take her to the Shenzhen border. Shenzhen is a special economic zone right on the border between Guangdong Province and Hong Kong. They would put her in a van. They wanted us to send a vice consul to Foshan to ride in the van with her, sedated, to the border. They would take her out, put her in a wheelchair, and the vice consul would then wheel the wheelchair across the border to Hong Kong. We said, “Yoo hoo! No, no, no, no, no. We're not doing this at all.”

Their idea of getting rid of her was to take her to Hong Kong, not send her back to her home in London, because it was so much cheaper for them. The Chinese will not spend money on anything that they don't have to, and certainly not foreign exchange certificates.

Then we contacted Hong Kong, and Hong Kong said if this lady comes down to Hong Kong, according to Hong Kong law, there is nothing they can do for her. They cannot hospitalize her unless she voluntarily commits herself, because she would not have committed any act that would be contrary to Hong Kong law, and she would not be a threat to either herself or society.

So we knew full well that if this lady was on her own in Hong Kong, what she would do is turn around and come back to China. So around and around and around. The family in London was no help at all.

Finally, after enormous, enormous, enormous finagling and dealing with the British Embassy in Beijing and dealing with the family through our embassy in London, we made arrangements. The Chinese were willing to declare her incapable of making decisions on her own. So with that in hand, then we were able legally to step in and make arrangements

on her behalf. We had the family's permission. The husband was so touching, he was really wonderful. He permitted us to use her money to pay for her way, for her medevac. Very thoughtful to the bitter end.

But to get her out, we could not even send her out on a plane that transited Hong Kong, because for one thing, she would have to transfer planes in Hong Kong. It would be a stretcher case, because she would have to be sedated and escorted all the way back to London. If she transferred planes, Hong Kong immigration would consider her to have attempted to enter Hong Kong, and therefore they would not accept the mainland Chinese psychiatric evaluation that she was incompetent. So we had to find a flight that got her out directly, bypassing Hong Kong, back to London. We had to send her up to Beijing on CAC and have her transfer to a British Airways flight, and then go back to London that way.

First we hired one nurse to come up from Hong Kong to escort her all the way back to London, and British Airways announced that she couldn't fly unless she had two nurses, so we had to hire a second one. That was at the last minute, we got this nurse. This all happened during the very week that I was transferring from Guangzhou to Beijing, so I was making all the arrangements in Guangzhou. Then I flew up and moved to Beijing and was there for her arrival when she came up. I went out to meet the plane.

It turned out that the “wonderful” psychiatric institution in Foshan did not supply sufficient sedatives to the nurses to last them for the entire trip to London. I only found this out 45 minutes before the flight was due to leave Beijing, so we went running around. Fortunately there's an airport clinic in Beijing, and they happened to have, because we were still in China, exactly the same kind of sedative that they'd been using down in Guangzhou. So we bought out their entire supply and sent it along, just in case. (Laughs) It worked out just as well, because apparently the flight was delayed at a couple of points along the line.

When last seen, she was ambulatory when she arrived in London, and British Airways wanted to take her to a hospital for “a check up” at the psychiatric hospital. She refused

to go, and walked out of the airport on her own steam, and has never been seen since. (Laughs) I mean, her family has seen her. She went home, but she, fortunately, never came back to China.

Q: Then you became consul general in Beijing. When was this?

RASPOLIC: This was July of 1986, and I was there until July of 1988.

Q: When you were in the consulate, how did you view your consular support from the embassy?

RASPOLIC: Quite differently. When I was in Guangzhou, I regarded the Guangzhou operation as entirely independent. I would pick and choose which issues I wanted to inform Beijing about or to keep them informed if I thought they might be interested in it, or if I thought it might be precedent-setting, you know, contribute to consular operations in general in China. But I felt that we were the largest post in the country in terms of manpower and IV caseload, and we dealt directly with the Department. Beijing did not visit us and was totally unaware of what the hell we were doing, so therefore I felt no strong allegiance to the consular section in Beijing.

Q: Now you changed hats.

RASPOLIC: Now my opinion of Guangzhou is, “What the hell are they doing? Don't they know that they can't do that? Didn't they read our last directive? Haven't they been following the correspondence, for example, from Shanghai, where we've info'd all the consulates? What are they doing? Why are they not acknowledging that this is not new ground?” This kind of thing. “On this particular issue, whatever it is, why are they going directly to the Department? Why aren't they asking us first? Why aren't they giving us the option of speaking for all posts in the country, rather than negotiating with the Department independently?” Your perspective is quite different.

Q: What was your operation like in Beijing?

RASPOLIC: It was half the size of Guangzhou in the sense of manpower, and we only had five American officers and one American secretary. We had 14 Chinese employees. It literally was half. But the division of labor was quite different, and the portfolio was different. Granted, in house we had normal visa operations and American Citizen Services.

In terms of visas, when I first got there, we issued both immigrant and non-immigrant visas, but we were in the process of trying to consolidate all immigrant visa issuing in Guangzhou. We felt it was unnecessary to have a duplicate operation in Beijing, in terms of IVs. We didn't have sufficient American personnel, and our Chinese staff was not experienced enough to be able to deal with the variety of cases that we were getting. Whereas Guangzhou had so much experience in this and these cases were just routine in Guangzhou, we figured out that obviously it was going to be physically inconvenient for some of our northern applicants, but since over 85% of the applicants came from the south and of the Beijing applicants, Shanghai used to be in their consular district for IV purposes, almost half the Beijing applicants were from Shanghai and it was equidistant for them to go to Guangzhou as to Beijing. So we felt ultimately we were inconveniencing maybe 200 to 400 people a year, but we were benefiting almost 15,000 to 16,000. So that's what we did. We really received very little flak for it. I think it was much more efficient.

It also gave us time in Beijing to concentrate on our biggest operation, and that was non-immigrant visas. Last year I think we issued in between 35 and 40,000 non-immigrant visas, and those were issuances. We must have refused thousands more. So we were very, very busy in our NIV section.

Before, we had not been utilizing our staff, I think, very efficiently. Our experienced officer was issuing IVs, because it was more complicated, even though it affected a very minimal number of people, whereas NIVs, which were not as complicated but had a much broader impact, were being supervised and issued by junior officers, with very little supervision. I

was not at all at ease with that. I think we have a much more efficient, much more reliable operation now.

American Citizen Services is very busy in Beijing because most American tourists who come to China are certainly not going to leave China without having visited Beijing. It's a very popular tourist site. We have the traditional gamut of problems of ACS, and we have a lot of deaths, a lot of people suffering from what a consular officer several years ago referred to as the “Peking duck syndrome.” (Laughs) Death by duck. The elderly person, because a tourist in China generally is elderly, because they're the ones who have the money and the time to afford to go to China, they go, they're taken out at 6:00 in the morning, they're off to see the Great Wall, then tromping through the Ming tombs, and they stop off at the Forbidden City. Then they go back to the hotel, shower and change, and go out for a banquet. By the time they get back to the hotel, it's 10:00 or 11:00 at night. You're 75 years old and you had a bypass 15 years before, and bingo! It happens.

Q: How did you find the Chinese as far as helping you with the death cases?

RASPOLIC: Very helpful. We had, I think, very good relations with the major hospitals in town. We had two or three hospitals with foreigners' clinics that we dealt with extensively, both for death and illness cases. The civil authorities were very helpful, the people at the crematorium were very helpful to us, Customs, when we had to ship ashes or bodies out, they really went out of their way many times. The Chinese were very, very thoughtful. Tourism is an important business to them, it is their main industry, and they certainly don't like seeing tourists die.

Q: How did the consular section fit into the embassy?

RASPOLIC: Quite well. This gets me back to one other point that I wanted to make. Our division of labor at the embassy regarding consular affairs did not necessarily match the division of labor at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Therefore, as the consul general, I was responsible oftentimes for administering parts of our bilateral Consular Convention,

which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs associated with the consular section because it was a consular convention. However, within the embassy, the issue at hand was probably either an administrative matter or something that would be normally handled by the front office, but which I would be involved in because of the Consular Convention.

To give you some specifics, the whole question of reciprocity. If we let their staff in Chicago travel within a radius of 25 miles of the post, then that means our staff in Shenyang can travel within a radius of 25 miles. Are we going to argue back and forth as to who's not getting their 25 miles? Or if we opened Route 395 for them to exit Washington via the south, does this mean, then, that the people in Shanghai can drive to Hangzhou directly, or do they have to go by train and not take a personal car? This is the kind of negotiation that I would get involved in because of the consular convention, not because of the consular section.

Customs clearance matters were in the Consular Convention and several other points like that. I oftentimes would get involved in things that wouldn't normally be considered to be consular work at other posts.

But as far as how we fit into the other sections, we worked very closely with a lot of the other sections. We worked very closely with P and C, which in China is called the Press and Cultural Section, which in most other posts is the USIS section. But for a variety of reasons, when posts were established in China, they could not be called USIS, so they were called Press and Cultural.

We dealt frequently with the cultural affairs office because there were lots of student exchanges going on, and these people were using the form IAP-66. It used to be DSP-66.

Q: This is the exchange-student form.

RASPOLIC: Yes, the exchange-student form, cultural exchange. These would be issued by P and C, and so we worked very closely with them. We worked very closely with them

also because they were constantly expediting sending over large groups of Chinese entertainers to the United States, who would have contractual commitments here to perform on X date, but their passports wouldn't be issued until the last minute by the Chinese authorities, so therefore it was up to us to expedite the visa issuance.

The Chinese have very laborious passport issuance procedures, and they could care less about other countries' visa procedures. If we wanted the person in the United States by a certain date, or if they had to be there by a certain date, then it was certainly not up to them to waive their passport procedures, but it was clearly up to us to waive our visa issuance procedures. So we would go round and round and round about this all the time. We had very complicated China-specific visa procedures that we have to follow.

Q: Is communism a problem?

RASPOLIC: Oh, sure.

Q: As far as clearances.

RASPOLIC: Very much so. Our law requires it, our procedures require it. We have to presume membership in most cases, because in most cases the membership is not acknowledged by the individual applicant, but we do have to take a look at the applicant and what his or her position is, and whether it is not unusual to assume that that person would be a Party member.

Q: Did you attend country-team meetings? Were you a part of that?

RASPOLIC: Yes, very much so.

Q: Did you find that you were being used as a source of information about how things were going?

RASPOLIC: Not necessarily a source, but I felt very much that I was an active participating member of the country team. If the ambassador asked for comments on any given situation, there was never any reason for me to feel that my comment was not as well received as anyone else's around the table. The ambassador, I think, was very good about that.

Q: How about dealing with Washington? In my days, particularly with matters of visa problems, I found that if I wanted to stall or didn't want to do something, I would refer things to Washington. I found it's far better to resolve almost anything you could think of right at the post if you wanted to take action, because you never were sure of what answer you might get, or if you would get an answer. Have you found this to be true?

RASPOLIC: Not as much as it used to be. I agree with you that before, if you went back to the Department and asked for guidance, that really was putting the whole case in the deep freeze until you got the guidance. But you could pretty much rely on getting the guidance. I don't think that that is used all that much anymore, primarily because the Department, in some offices, has been notorious in not responding. Therefore, it is not efficient to go back and ask for guidance when you're not going to get any guidance. What you're going to have is a very unhappy applicant, his family, supporters, and congressmen, and it puts you in a untenable position because you can't keep saying you're waiting for guidance when this goes on month after month after month, no matter. For example, if you're talking about the Visa Office, I found that the Visa Office simply has no shame, so therefore you can't try and shame them into replying to you. They simply won't.

So if I had to send something back to the Department, I would tell the applicant that it's not a question of, “Change your plane reservations or whatever. We're going to go back and ask for guidance.” What I would have to say is, “I have to refer this case to the Department. I don't know when I will receive a reply. It may be up to six months. Don't call me; I'll call you.” It would have to be under those circumstances.

I was very frustrated, particularly during the Beijing tour, with the lack of prompt reply from the Department. I felt that it clearly hindered some of our operations, our visa negotiations, our treaty negotiations that we had going on with the Chinese. I think they could have moved forward much more rapidly had we had some prompt replies. I think that the lack of prompt reply is a direct reflection on who is operating at whatever level in the Visa Office, the people who were in one particular office. When I was in Guangzhou, the Visa Office had established one particular back-up person in Washington, one position to back up the visa negotiations from the Washington side. My predecessor in Beijing had the advantage of that.

When I got there, the visa office, for some unknown reason, abolished the position and gave that responsibility to someone else who already had a full plate. Therefore, I would send in visa negotiation updates asking for guidance, and then I would have to fight to get a reply. Sometimes it would take up to six months! Well, the Chinese, I believe, totally misunderstood this and thought that this reflected a lack of interest on the American side, which simply wasn't the case.

If they're not going to give you authority to conduct the negotiations without the guidance, then they damn well ought to take the responsibility of giving you the guidance! You can't have it both ways. I found that extremely frustrating.

Q: I've kept you here for a very long time. Looking back, what do you feel gave you the greatest pleasure or was your great accomplishment on the consular side? Anything that you'd particularly like to think that you have done or which has given you personal pleasure?

RASPOLIC: Throughout all the tours, I think probably in Ethiopia I had the most personal pleasure in standing at the airport, waving goodbye to some of these ladies that I'd been trying to get out of the country for months on end. (Laughs)

Q: Because you had been working so hard on this.

RASPOLIC: And it literally was an opportunity to follow a case from the beginning, from the very moment they walked in your office.

Q: These were the American wives married to Ethiopians.

RASPOLIC: Yes, who were being denied exit visas to leave Ethiopia. From the time they walked in my office until the time that I literally escorted them to the airport to make sure they got on the plane, because I wasn't going to believe anyone else telling me that they had left town. I think those were probably the most comforting, reassuring cases.

Q: What do you think of the Foreign Service as a career?

RASPOLIC: I'm a firm believer.

Q: Unlike many, you are still an active member of the Foreign Service. You are going to be an inspector soon.

RASPOLIC: Yes. I think it's a truly unique career. I find that sometimes it's difficult to convey what I'm really doing, except to another Foreign Service officer, because I know when I speak to non-Foreign Service friends or family members and I tell them what it's like to see the temples of Pagan in Burma, or what it's like to have dinner in Jimmy's Kitchen in Hong Kong, or what it's like to run into a friend on K Street that I haven't seen since ten years ago in Paris, or whatever, to me this is a normal life. But to non-Foreign Service friends, they're either in awe or they're turned off completely because they think I'm name-dropping, or they're just mystified by such a foreign way of life. To me it's normal. I've come back from five years in China, and I can't understand why the streets of Washington are so empty, why there are no pedestrians, why there are no bicycles, why there are so few cars.

Q: I had the same feeling when I left Naples. Where's the traffic?

RASPOLIC: That's right. I've been back eight months now, and to me it's an absolute delight to go to Safeway! (Laughs) I absolutely love it! I can get whatever I want. It's just amazing. If I see a recipe in the newspaper, I don't have to plan on making it six months from now after my next trip to Hong Kong when I can get the missing ingredients. I spent half my life and half my salary at the Kennedy Center. I feel as though it's another foreign posting to be here, and I am taking full advantage of it.

Q: Liz, I want to thank you very, very much for this interview. I appreciate it.

RASPOLIC: It's my pleasure.

End of interview